



Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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Introduction to the Journal

I began writing the journal on May 6, 1945, the day I was liberated from Weisswasser, the camp in occupied Czechoslovakia, in a region called Moravia. Our transport of 201 girls arrived from Auschwitz, in mid December, 1944, when the evacuations were started. It was my last chance to get out and it probably saved my life since it was assumed that everybody remaining there would be killed before the Red Army could arrive. We found about 200 other girls in Weisswasser from an earlier transport, they had come from another camp and were all of Hungarian origin. Those from Auschwitz were a mixture from Hungary, Holland, France and Greece, speaking all kinds of languages. We worked at the "Friese Werk" factory (I.G. Farben Industries) where French P.O.W.s also worked. The French lived in the nearby town of Schildberg, had a little more freedom and were allowed to receive money and packages from home. Most of them helped us Jewish girls with food and toiletries: soap, combs, toothbrushes etc. We had not seen such items during the seven months we had spent in Auschwitz. With their kindness and access to the news from the front, they also provided us with psychological support.

I forgot how I found a pen and notebook but I must have been very eager to record all my new emotions, to confide in someone, even a diary. The first word written is "Freedom" and I try to grasp its meaning. I was often asked how did it feel to be liberated, to have survived and I had great difficulty answering it. My diary had been lost for decades and only recently did I retrieve it and remembered how I had to smuggle it out from Communist Romania. Now, as I read it again, it was all there, how I felt at that very moment, the joys of breathing free air, of eating enough, of taking a bath and sleeping in a clean bed with white sheets, all were unimaginable sensations, overwhelming. I write about the move to the town of Schildberg, where the new Czech authorities helped us with housing and food until they thought that the trip home would be safe. I experienced enjoyment of being alive again, of having company, of meeting the German engineer in whose office I had worked as a draftsman and seeing him doing forced labor for the liberators. As the date of the journal reaches May 13, I start to recall what happened a year before and I describe the ghetto, my brothers Moishi, Yancu, my father and my mother on our last day home. They all come alive again, I can feel the intensity of those dreadful events that changed our lives forever: the weeks in the Ghetto, the terrible night in the Temple, the agonizing trip to the railroad station, the cattle car, the arrival in Auschwitz and separation from my loved ones. I cry as I remember all my brothers, wonder if they survived, where they could be, fear that maybe nobody will ever return home besides me. I long for my boyfriend Tzali and question if I should go back to Sighet at all, if I am

ready for the ultimate great disappointment. The pages of my journal were washed with the tears I shed when I wrote them, and I added new tears as I reread them with my husband. The pain, anguish, doubts and fear expressed then are overpowering. I was there, again. It was still painful to read it but this time I was not alone -- Tzali was there with me in Schildberg. The journal ended twelve days later on the eve of my leaving toward hometown, still not knowing the extent of the losses in my family, with the big question "What is home now? Who is home?"

My brothers and parents did not make it home but my boyfriend was waiting for me and we started a new life on the ashes of those who perished.

The Jewish Publication Society had me submit the diary hoping they could locate similar materials written at liberation for an anthology. They were unable to find others, increasing the archival value of my diary. I have a letter from Elie Wiesel, who was also born in Sighet, who read the diary and called the account "heart-rending".

I submitted a book for publication. This diary will be part of it. I believe that your magazine could be interested in its entirety or excerpt it.

(Azhov.)

Liberation Journal

Sunday, May 6, 1945, Weisswasser

Freedom! How can one express the feeling with one word only? We get up, clean our room as usual, [get ready to go to work] but outside something is happening. Roll call is announced, but after five minutes the *kapos* return to say that there will be no work today -- that never happened before. In the courtyard, there is great excitement. Rumors are circulating: the Russian Army is about 40-50 km to the east and so are the Americans to the west. The Germans will flee, they are packing, they are all in civilian clothes. Every minute there are new rumors: today we might be free... in the evening the Americans could be here. And most important, for dinner we will have *kolrabe* and potatoes. Now that is exciting!

On the highway down in the valley we can see refugees in carriages and bicycles. A few of the French prisoners are at the railroad station, they have arrived from Schildberg. In the afternoon more Frenchmen entered the camp to free us. Can one really grasp this? Being free? There is screaming. All the girls are in the courtyard or at the fences, they kiss and hug and cry; those outside comfort us and shake our hands through the fence.

The gate is finally opened, the Germans have disappeared, we all run outside. Baba and I run up the hill behind the camp. From the top of the hill, I look down at the valley: what a beautiful view! Back in camp the kitchen people are distributing bread again, and sugar and salt and marmalade. What anarchy! Everybody is grabbing food and saving it. The beds are full of potatoes. Some girls have started cooking, there is a fire in every room. This is real freedom -- being able to eat enough. There are men in the camp and in the rooms; they are our friends. Baba is late. She went to Schildberg with her French friends. We are keeping vigil in front of the barracks, the rain is pouring.

It is night, I am in my bunkbed, I cannot sleep from the excitement. The Commander's speech still rings in my ears. "I declare you free. The camp is open for you. Those who wish can still sleep here, but I warn you, if something happens to the camp supervisor, I will not refrain from retaliating accordingly. The key to the food storage was turned over to the *Lager-alteste* [the Jewish overseer]. If you plan frugally, you will have enough food for a while. Try your best... You are free!" It seems so incredible to have reached this moment and to hear such words from the murderer's mouth! The girls whisper to one another, there is quiet outside, yet nobody is asleep. Is this really happening?

Are we really free?

Monday, May 7,

The morning finds us exhausted. Everyone wants to prepare meals; there is enough food, but we still go to the kitchen because they are distributing more potatoes and turnips, also flour and coffee; food is carried in pails and fill our beds. We clean the rooms, the Frenchmen will arrive soon. They find us sweeping the floors. There is animated discussion among the French and our girls.

In the afternoon we took a long stroll on the highway and reached the town of Schildberg. How beautiful this trip was, how lovely the countryside! Andre took us to the French prisoners' dormitory. One man offered us bread, he thought we were still starving.

We returned by train... what an experience... to travel on a passenger train again, to breathe the fresh air, to look out the window, to delight in the wonderful landscape, to be free and feel it so intensely. Sitting near us were Homer, Anatole and Michel, who are so generous and I am so grateful for this trip, it is unforgettable. One station, another station, we can hardly sit from the excitement. The boys laugh, we are like small children; we are in a frenzy and for every little pleasure we are grateful to all of them, even to the fate that has been so cruel to us. No, this short trip cannot be forgotten.

Tuesday, May 8,

Great news, intense happiness. This morning the cease-fire was signed between the Russians and the Germans. The war has ended! Girls, do you know what this means? In the courtyard there is great agitation. "Dori" -- the girls ask me -- "go and see what is happening". Outside the rumor is that the Russians are close by, they might even arrive by the evening and the Commander has advised the girls to move out because the Russian soldiers are very wild. That's all right for him to say, but I don't have anywhere to go, so I will stay. Everybody is busy preparing: some girls are sewing backpacks out of blankets, some cook food, yet others are ready to leave. The camp looks like a shelter where tourists have stayed during a storm and are now ready to go on their way. "What should we do?" everyone is asking. For the night we organize again guards. But tomorrow, our French friends will take care of us. Mrs. Halpert [a woman from Sighet who came to Weisswasser a few weeks earlier] who was looking for shelter in the villages found only German houses and returned. Everyone else is restless, running around. But in our room there is relative calm: we are all staying. Suddenly we hear the whistle for roll-call. What is happening? We are all scared. An armed soldier opens the door to our room. His looks are frightening. Someone says: "If they want to execute us, let's scream". The soldier orders us to leave the room. We don't understand what is happening, why we have to leave. I put on my shoes, just in case. Most of the

girls run out and away from the gate. But it was only a scare -- a check because food had been stolen.

We hear a cannon roar. The girls take their bundles and run in all directions. Again nothing serious. We return to our room and all calm down. We cook, clean the room. Again cannon shots. We continue doing our jobs and we sing "the Song of the Gypsy", *Tango Bolero*.

Suddenly Jean, one of the French prisoners, arrives. Baba sent him to pick me up and take me to Schildberg. The girls are frightened and look at me. Will I go? I run to Mrs. Halpert's barrack, she advises me to leave, she will also come. The others are disappointed, "Dori, you are also leaving us?" I promise I will return after the Russians arrive, perhaps even tomorrow, but in the depth of my heart I feel that we are parting and I am torn.

On the road the traffic is heavy. I am loaded with packages and my legs hurt very much. But the trip is enjoyed nevertheless. We rested twice and when I lied down on the grass for the first time and looked up at the sky and breathed in the fresh air, oh, God, how long had I waited for such a moment! The Germans are fleeing. We hear that the Russians are in the village just before Schildberg. Shootings, explosions. It is very hot. Again thunder, again explosions, but we had arrived in town.

We slept in the men's dormitory. During the night we had to go into the shelter twice. The Germans are still resisting.

Wednesday, May 9,

The Russians have arrived! When we were awakened at 4.30 we were told that they had been in the town for the past two hours. I had a bad night of stomach pain [too much food or too good food the night before]. The Russians are at the gate of our building. Some of the French men go out to talk to them. Finally I also go out. There are jeeps and tanks on the street. We wave to each other, but in the entire town ours is the only lively group of French men and just-liberated Jewish girls meeting some of their liberators. We talk, we learn a few Russian words.

The Russian soldiers let us enter the shoe store that was being looted. Shoe organization! [Camp slang for acquiring something.] My God, when I was separated from Zsuzsi in Birkenau last summer and was so upset that I had been tattooed -- meaning that I would never get out alive from Auschwitz -- would I have believed that the day would come when I would only have to show my tattooed number and doors would open for me? "Evreica?" -- "Jewish girl"? -- "Haftling?" -- "prisoner?" -- "Tac, tac," -- "yes, yes"--, they say, making room for us to choose any shoe we want and as many as we want.

But I have to return to Weisswasser, I promised. I wonder what has happened there? Halfway to the camp we get a ride in a jeep. How bohemian we look: three girls, three boys, the wind blows our hair in the brightly

shining sun, -- one can feel the taste of freedom. This is what we have been longing for. We walk the final part of our journey, but I lag behind. I cannot take the long trip, yet something draws me back to the camp. But our friends are no longer there. We find out that the Russians arrived yesterday just after we left and took the girls away in two trucks. Very few are left and a third truck is expected soon. The remaining girls are all dressed up, waiting outside, carrying huge bundles.

And the camp, what a sight! Empty of people but full of clothes, pillows, stockings, shoes. And we had brought shoes from the store for our roommates. Scattered on the floors are boiled potatoes, potato pancakes, rice and meat, strewn as if the tenants had to make a quick escape. Here a good glove, there a shirt, a bale of cotton, one could take anything if one needed such rags. Our room is unrecognizable. The other rooms are also open and look the same. And not a soul in them. Poor children! All gone!

When we return to Schildberg, some Russians give us a ride in their jeep. We try to speak Russian with them. They stare at us and wonder how we enjoy the trip. We see a group of girls walking along, There's Ella. We wave. They look happy.

Upon arrival in the French camp, I feel very tired. I am sewing a backpack. I sleep on the upper bunk, Baba on the lower. We are among very few girls there, the other bunkbeds are occupied by the men. This dormitory looks like a hostel for tourists. I hear Hungarian music. There must be a merry atmosphere downstairs in the dining room. Entertainment. Music.

We had visitors, Fraulein Harverman and Herr Godder [the German coworkers from the factory]. I saw him yesterday working at road construction with a shovel in his hand and with fear and despair in his face. "Then you, but now it is our turn" he said to me.

Thursday, May 10,

We discuss finding a house to live in until we can start on our journey home. We get one, a sweet little cottage in the Czech borough, completely quiet, isolated, with two bedrooms and a kitchen. The German owners had run away. So, the three of us (me, Baba and Itza) and three Frenchmen move in. We have a pleasant supper in the main room at a large table by candlelight.

Friday, May 11,

We prepared an excellent lunch, but needed company to make it special. I was able to find Mr. Godder who accepted our invitation with great surprise, but did not show up. However Jacques, Rene and Andre came to join us. We had no liquor, but we did have music and danced. Rene sang: *C'est mon village au clair de lune* and *Tango Bolero*. Will I ever be able to bring such magic to an

evening when I return home? Such good food, candlelight, the dark cool room, pleasant company, Baba flirting... Tzali... Tzali.

And last night, everything I had been dreaming of, at once: a wonderful meal, a great warm bath, a fresh snowwhite nightgown, a neat, clean bed with both a pillow and quilt, being alone in the small bedroom, waking up in the morning the same way I went to bed; would I have believed that so many emotions could break loose inside a person and all be endured?

The few girls who remained in Weisswasser had ugly stories to tell about the Russian soldiers. To save themselves from rape, some jumped out of windows and were badly injured.

Saturday, May 12,

I am home writing. Marcel [the friend of the two others who exchanged letters with Baba and Itza during the confinement] is in the other room and luckily he does not bother me. The whole afternoon I was lying exhausted, not from work, but from my thoughts, my expectations, my fears. My little room is cool, I hear birds chirping outside, somewhere an accordion is being played. It is a bright, sunny day, the trees are blossoming... "It is May and the lilacs are blooming, it is May and my heart is freezing" {I recall the tunes of this old Hungarian song}... to what should I compare these surroundings? Never mind, it is so pleasant, so sweet and yet so painful.

I am troubled. I feel I would rather stay here and not go home. I am scared. Where will I go? To whom? Is there anybody for me in Sighet? I will arrive on such a splendid May day, I will run home full of hopes and who will be there? Mother? Father? No, I can no longer deceive myself with such illusions. My dearest parents! How much did I love you -- only now do I realize it. Why didn't I behave towards you as you deserved? Father, forgive me; mother too that I was not always considerate, that I caused you so many worries and so much aggravation. I am expecting you to be there waiting for me with open arms. God, why is our fate so cruel?

Yancu darling, maybe you will be home. Look, I am even bringing you a pair of shoes. You will like them, won't you? And you will be happy to see your sister who thought of you so often. Whom can I count on? Moishi, you are my only hope, the only one I trust has survived. I implore you, do not disappoint me, I don't want to remain alone in the family. Ebi, my dear, where are you? Look at the tears that I shed writing these lines. I will search for you up in Budapest, where you were last time, even though I know that if you have survived these times you are probably home... but I don't dare to hope that I will find even a small family there. Part of the family... or just one person waiting for me. Lord, look how my demands shrink, how crushed I have become. Dear Ezu, did you have enough strength to endure?

Yossie, are you alive? Five years since you left, but we never found out if you reached Russia? Alter, will you be there? Maybe you are working for a Jewish newspaper or at a theatre? Do you think of me? And Miki, no... no... I am not allowed to delude myself with such wonderful dreams of finding you home because the disappointment will be so terrible. And it will be... oh... dear brothers, parents, my home, I am yearning terribly and it hurts so much that I can hardly bear it.

Tzali, I don't know what to say, but if I lose you too than I had rather been taken to the gas chamber or run into the electric fence. Today, the memories are haunting me: our time in Cluj, the brick factory where we skied, all this was so very beautiful. You will be waiting for me, won't you? And you still love me.

Wouldn't it be better to stay here, to listen to the birds chirping and to deceive myself that once I had a boyfriend, Tzali, whom I loved so much, whom I see when I look at any man and who is waiting for me with outstretched arms, to hug me, to hold me. Maybe he even has a little room like this one, quiet, cozy and he will love me as before... dreams of love... God, the disillusionments are hurting me already.

Why is this May so beautiful and yet so painful?

Sunday, May 13,

It was Saturday last year: gorgeous May day, the apple tree in the backyard was in full blossom. It was our last day at "home" in the ghetto. Poor father was reading a newspaper on a bench outside while I was lying on the couch inside reading, *The Life of William Clissold*. Mr. Rath [whose family shared our ghetto room] came in, went to bed and started to snore. I was aggravated, went out and complained bitterly to Father that "this is intolerable for a person not to have a peaceful place, a private home, but to have to share a room with strangers. It is too cool outside, where else can I read?"

Yes, fate has punished me as I deserved for making such complaints. Yet Father never said such words, he never complained, he never showed displeasure. Oh, if I could be like him. When I am angry or nervous, thinking about Father always calms me down.

Moishi still felt like a guest. [He had just returned from the Ukrainian front where the Jewish young men served in forced labor battalions, his whole unit was recalled home and no one understood why.] He suffered with a terrible toothache. There were no doctors or dentists around. I sat on the couch near him and we talked.

Outside, rumors circulated that they will liquidate the ghetto! It is probably just a false alarm like the others, I told myself. I returned home,

joined Mother who was sitting in the backyard with some neighbors. We talked. It was getting dark. Yes, twilight.

My last memory from "home".

Monday, May 14,

Godder arrived as we were having our breakfast. The house was a mess. Everyone was still in nightgowns even though it must have been midday. Amid shame and embarrassment we invited him for coffee and the girls jumped at this chance to have a German in the house to tell him everything, everything that happened over the last year: every detail about Auschwitz, everything that the Germans did to us, how they destroyed our homes, our families, how cruelly his "civilized" people had behaved, the crematoriums, the selections, Mengele. Poor Godder, he was so taken aback by this attack that he said something like "Yes, yes, it is so, but now, we innocent people have to suffer because of it".

I was sorry to see him in such an uncomfortable position, at the same time I was glad that it happened. When I was a prisoner working in his office, I could never have talked this way, never have raised my voice and complain. [He was the only German who was kind to me and brought me food occasionally]. And now, as a free person, I was unable to tell him off as the others did! But he should know it all, for if he suffers for it, at least he will know why.

For me... there would have been satisfaction enough in inviting him once for dinner. Then he would see that we can also eat, not only starve; that we can live nicely, that we too know how to dress [that we had been civilized and educated people before].

After dinner we went to the Erike hotel. So many young couples, all happy, all in love. This Schildberg now looks like a summer resort -- boys and girls in shorts or Tyrolean pants, some in long pants, strolling on the main street, hugging, kissing, without a care in the world. It is May, the sky is bright and shiny, freedom is wonderful, no one has to work, one can eat enough and make love.

May 14, a year ago... that's when it all started, at six in the morning. We had been told the night before to be ready to leave. No one knew where. There was a rumor that we will be taken to the west bank of the Danube to work. Poor Mother, she did not want to go, she insisted that we move to Timar street [at the other end of the ghetto]. God, if only we had listened to her, maybe... maybe she would be alive and I would be so happy; because those living on Timar street arrived at Auschwitz on the second transport and many entered the camp with their mothers and left the place a few days later to work in factories in Germany. Why? Wasn't my mother younger and better looking than Mrs. Nemes or Mrs. Landau or Mrs. Kormos [who all entered the camp]? No, our destiny could not have been so kind.

We left our ghetto houses with tears in our eyes: children, women, most ~~could~~ hardly stride on their own but they had to bear the load of packages that the family was allowed to take. We looked back and we felt that we would ~~never~~ come back.

"How green was my valley". [That title came to my mind whenever I thought of my hometown as it had been before].

Waiting on the street, before leaving the ghetto. All over were lying remnants of Jewish work that people discarded: pillows, quilts, clothing, whole packages, who could carry so much? And who needed it? At this point life was important, nothing else mattered. Unfortunately, only Father seemed to be aware of this. Moishi sat crouched near a ditch with the severe toothache. I brought him some medicine, sat down near him and he put his tired head in my lap. Dear brother, I can count on you, can't I? Unless you were also caught in some unforeseen tragedy. Because if I survived then so could you. Dear Moishi!

The walk to the Great Synagogue was the most terrible thing I could have imagined. The Hungarian gendarmes chased the crowd of thousands while our gentile neighbors stayed in their homes and stared from the windows. We were exhausted by the weight of our belongings, our palms became bloody from carrying them, our shoulders hurt, we were bathed in sweat... how long can it last? We drop our suitcases along the way, bedding falls and nobody cares, women cry and faint, children remaining behind get lost in the crowd crying and sobbing. "Ahead!" [is the command].

One cannot even stop except to leave everything on the pavement, wipe the perspiration from one's forehead and start again, much relieved. But who would leave all of his "small fortune" on the street? Clothes, baby carriages? Who in this huge crowd is aware that his life is worth less than a speck of dust on the street? No, they continue running, their backs are bent from the weight of their bundles, they still try to pick up fallen stuff, but the whip hits them with the order "Go ahead, faster, faster!"

Our house. I don't dare to look at it when we pass by.

I think Christ's calvary could not have been worse because he only carried the cross on his shoulders and the whole world of Christianity sings praises to him. Who will ever mention us? Only Father could, if he lived. Dear father, you have to be alive. This misery and suffering demands vindication. The blood may scream, but you have to give it a voice, father....

The synagogue... the searches... the night. There has never been such a long night before. I was able to sneak downstairs to the men. How tired and exhausted they were! My poor Yancu, not even fifteen years old and he has to suffer his lot. They took everything during the searches. It doesn't matter. "Father, we still have clothes on us, they will serve wherever they will take us. I hear that we will be allowed to return". No, one cannot be so deceived.

Tzali's nephew, Yortzo, poor child, not even five years old. How many times in my mind have I heard him repeat his cry, "I want to go home, I want to go home!" Could he feel with his few years where destiny would take him? Did he ever hear of the gas chambers and of the crematorium? Did any of us hear of them?

Thousands are gathered in this Synagogue, tired, exhausted, lying on the benches or on the floor, on one another, children crying. Our eyes are closing and we don't have where to put our heads for a little rest. There is a suitcase and Zsuzsi, Laichi and I take turns sleeping on it. How hard it must be for people in love to see each other suffering so. It is barely two o'clock. I look around. Father isn't asleep either. It takes a good hour for me to make my way to him through the crowd on the floor. [Mother remained upstairs with the women after being body-searched.] "Come, take a little preserve, father, why save it?" It is only three o'clock, only four o'clock and I did not close my eyes the entire night.

Five o'clock. Movement outside. The guards have entered. We must get ready to leave! Where? Home? No, not after a day and a night like this. That would be too beautiful. We are being taken toward the railroad station. After the searches, our parcels have dropped to less than half. It was a gorgeous May morning, just like those mornings when we used to gather in the square for our excursions. The sky was painfully clear, the lilacs in full bloom. The tower clock on the Catholic church showed six a.m. Time seemed to have stopped.

And we were marching toward our doom.

Wednesday, May 16,

Schildberg, vacation, summer resort, love, freedom... everything I had imagined in my most beautiful dreams. This carefree life cannot last long; this kind of love at a post-war tempo, when the only question is: "Did you go to bed with him?" or "Would you go to bed with him?" Everyone seems to have gotten accustomed too easily to this environment. Living together is so matter of fact, so natural, that separation will not be difficult as each party only counted on a pleasant affair. Maybe there are lovers waiting for them at home, maybe the Frenchmen have wives and children, yet they don't want to lose this great chance. They go on outings, they visit each other, they hug and kiss, they organize parties, they play cooking games.

There are problems surrounding our trip home. I don't want to stay here any more, this does not satisfy me. I need Tzali, only Tzali. I am so fearful of going home and yet it has become pressing. The roads are ruined, the bridges have been demolished. One must be careful of the many soldiers on the highways, lots of girls have been attacked already. The Frenchmen cannot come to escort us. How can we start? And Itza is sick [she had deep boils on her

back and I had to dress them], how can we take her home? And home! God, what a bitter disappointment will wait for me there. How will I be able to eat so much there, to live so comfortably, to sleep late, to stroll around in the town? I am afraid I will be boxed in, put to work. I will gladly work but I am not yet able. My endurance is so low. And to be with Tzali only limited hours -- no, no, I want him unrestricted as my love for him is boundless and I want to be with him forever.

Thursday, May 17,

It was one year ago. A day I will never, never forget. The third day of our trip. The wagon is crowded with sixty to seventy people and it is awfully hot inside; children, women, old folks, very few young people, all lying on the floor on their parcels, exhausted from the trip, from hunger, from heat and from sleeplessness. We got used to not having bread, but the lack of water is terrible, the thirst burns our throats, we seem to hear water running outside, to see water and we feel water with every inch of our bodies. Poor little Yortzo, we raise him to the window and teach him to ask, "*Bitte schon, ein bisschen Wasser*", but nobody has pity on the child. What did we really expect?

And what is waiting for us on arrival? Desperation is on faces... where are we travelling? Through Czechia... Slovakia... my goodness, are we going toward Lublin? Then this is the end of us. Toward Poland or toward Germany? For what? For work? Why then do they need the children and the old people? To a camp? Then why Germany? Mother starts to panic "Dori dear, I am so scared, they are taking us to our death!" I argue with her not to panic. Forgive me Mother dear, that I acted this way, why couldn't I understand that you had a premonition of what really was going to happen? No one felt it so strongly. Maybe Father felt it too? "Dear Dori, if they would just spare our lives, nothing else would matter".

I could not absorb it yet. We suffered in the suffocating heat. I wiped the sweat off Father's forehead, off Mother's and Yancu's and using something as a fan tried to give them a little air. Near us toward the corner of the cattle car was Tzali's family, suffering even more because of the child and the old grandmother. His sister Zsuzsi held on to Laichi.

Horrible trip, sleepless nights that seemed endless, lying one on the top of the other, sometimes changing to a more comfortable position with a loved one, feeling an occasional breeze that reached us through the small latticed window, dreaming of being free... free... how I longed for freedom since then. It is dark, people groan and moan, some whisper, children cry. Everybody is hungry, thirsty, tired and before us is the big unknown, will we survive it? Will they do to us what was done to the Jews in Galicia, kill us with machine guns? Or how else?

We are just crossing a bridge. Now, now, they should kill us now, they should turn the train over, then we would tumble in the cold water, oh, I wish to die now, what a relief such a death would be in this stiffling heat! But no, for us, death must not be a relief.

It is getting dark. We arrive at a station, something called Auschwitz; but for us this is not even important for we never heard of it. We are told from the outside that soon we will get out, get food and drink. Some people are even preparing their tin-cups. Poor, naive people! It is pitch dark now and we are still inside. I did not have one bite of food today, nor one drink of water. The time passes in great anxiety, we no longer dare to ask for water. But no, the locomotive whistles, we are moving again. Then we lie down to sleep. I am very tired, not having slept for many nights. Who knows how many sleepless nights are to follow, maybe I can close my eyes and fall asleep... I lie down at Mother's feet, because she is so sensitive and a stranger could not protect her the way I do. I place my head on Bunyi's chest [Laichi's older brother] because there is no other place and I am ready to doze off. The night is quiet, there is a fresh breeze once in a while to cool off our wet foreheads.

But very shortly the train stops again. I hear a terrifying scream in the night. Bunyi and I are up and listening... another one... cries... shrieks "*Mein Kind!*"... "*Mame!*"... "*Wie bist du?*" ("my child", "mother", "where are you?"). We run to the little window [and climb on suitcases to see better]. Mother is frightened, even I feel that we have arrived at our tragic end: now, this night, here in some hidden forest they will line us up and... no, I won't let it happen, I want to live, do you understand?!

My heart is beating fast, but I try to calm my dear mother, "Mother, nothing is happening there, they are just carrying away belongings of the people who are crying", or "they are getting off the train and they are being separated".

But the cries have intensified, there are some frightening shrieks, screams, loud orders given, packages thrown out of trains are lying at random between the tracks. No, one cannot calm down anybody anymore.

[Our doors are opened abruptly and orders are given in German] "*Heraus!*" "*Alle heraus!*"-- "Everyone get out, take some food with you. Leave all packages in the wagon"! We get dressed, the situation has become clear, it is now and here, still one clings to a few remaining possessions. Search lights reach the wagon, "All out!" Around the train there are men in striped uniforms. Is there a jail nearby whose prisoners help out? We leave everything behind except a little leftover marmalade that remained in our basket. There are blinding lights outside, we are driven alongside the train, others are getting off from the other track. We are all terrified. "Where are you children, let's keep together, so we don't get lost in the crowd. Zsuzsi,

Laichi, Dori, come on!" We don't know where we are going, the crowd is pushing us ahead, we just drag along, all around us are familiar faces from our transport.

[I hear on the loudspeaker that the men must form a column on the left, I cry out] "Mother, the men have to go a separate way". My dear mother is fainting. "Mother, Mother, please I implore you! Get hold of yourself". Moishi, Yancu, Father they are all crying and holding her, I cannot see because of the heavy tears. "Dear mother, we two will stay together. Don't worry, the men are only going to the baths. Mother look at me!" I was so happy that I will be with her. I felt so close to her, I hugged her and kissed her, my tears dropped on her face, did I feel that we too will be torn apart? Mother had the right instinct though, she knew, she felt the upcoming tragedy. She hardly opened her eyes and stumbled again in my arms. In despair we shouted, we cried, the crowd passed us by and moved ahead. "Mother dear, don't leave me alone". I know she didn't want to, the murderers did it. We again hugged my father and my two brothers and kissed their tear-soaked faces [and they disappeared in the crowd to follow the men].

I held Mother tightly by her arm so as not to lose her and we followed the multitude [of women and children]. Our happiness lasted a few steps only. I soon realized that in front of me the young girls were being sent in one direction, to the right and the mothers to the left. "Mother, they are separating us!" I panicked. She cried out "No, no!" What should I do? A wrong instinct advised me that there would be trouble for the young people, so I had better stay with Mother. I pulled the kerchief over my forehead, I walked stooped, I limped [to look as old as I could], but they could not be fooled. [As we got on front of the selecting officer] A stick appeared between the two of us, I was motioned to go to the right, mother to the left. I muttered something about going after her to say good-bye, but a club hit my arm and I was sent after the other girls. I looked back, Mother had stopped and stood as if petrified. I looked back again, I did not see her anymore, Zsuzsi was coming behind me with tears in her eyes [she had also been separated from her whole family])... and what happened thereafter?

Here was the beginning of the Birkenau hell.

It is after midnight now. So it was then. If someone would have shown me the present picture or would have told me, "Don't worry, silly, within one year you will be a free person, you will look good, grown fat, you will live in the romantic Sudeten region, you will live better than you did before, you will fry potato pancakes, you will be entertained by men, you will bake cakes for your trip home", I would have taken him for crazy and I still don't believe it. What? The present or the past?

And all day long we have been preparing for we are leaving the day after tomorrow. I am so restless and impatient... to find out what happened afterwards...

Home... what is the meaning of this word now. My heart sinks at the thought of it...

